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Jaja-Ibeno War of 1881: The Ibeno Account and the Refugee Settlements (*Pp. 119-133*)

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Abstract

This essay deliberates on the Ibeno account and refugee settlements of the Jaja-Ibeno War of 1881 which was untouched by the previous researchers. Its contributions include the causes and course of the war, the mercenaries hired by King Jaja of Opobo, the casualties and entreaties such as the deaths of the Ibeno monarch: King Uko Utong and his son Prince Nso, Jaja's rehabilitation of the Ibeno to prevent another war and the refugee camps. The need to give this history a balanced view made the paper to analyze the Ibeno relationship with Opobo and Jaja's establishment of his kingdom in Obolo (Andoni) country which led to his intrusion in the Kwa Ibo palm produce trade.

Keywords: Conflict, European trade, Opobo, Ibeno, impact, Refugee Settlements

Introduction

There are copious literatures on the Atlantic Trade and the Jaja-Ibeno War of 1881. Dike (1956) gave the fact that Atlantic Trade started with human cargo from 1400 to 1700. This was when Europe explored the Americas for sugar, cotton and coffee and needed enormous work force. Although Dike touched

on the Jaja-Ibeno War, he neither considers the Ibeno version nor the refugee settlements. So also is Lystad (1965) that concentrated his work on the shift from human cargo to palm oil trade between 1800 and 1900.

The works of Ikime (1972); Alagoa (1960); Cookey (1974:106-107) and Jones, (1963) reviewed the British aggressive policy to trade directly with the palm oil producers in the Niger Delta hinterland. The first step was to establish themselves at the Niger Delta coast. The second step is to expand into the Delta hinterland was resisted by the Delta middlemen. The resultant effect was the Jaja-Ibeno war of 1881 in the Eastern Niger Delta, the Nana-British war of 1894 in the Western Delta and the Akassa Raid of 1895 in the Central Delta. Thus, these complex subjects were treated without the Ibeno version and the refugee settlements of the Jaja-Ibeno war. Cookey (1974:106-107) published only the Opobo version. Owing to the above, this paper brings the Ibeno account and refugee settlements to knowledge.

Material and Methods of Reconstructing this History

Many sources of history were used in reconstructing this past. These are the primary sources of oral tradition, archival materials and manuscript brief history of actors and eyewitnesses. In the secondary sources are works of other researchers on the subject of study. Alagoa (1978:24) defines oral tradition as recollections of the remote past that are known in a culture area of oral civilization. They are viable sources for historical reconstruction in Africa. Opobo and Ibeno of our study being parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa had oral testimonies from the distant past transmitted from mouth to mouth through the generations. The common denominators that depict the historical past of the people were used in reconstructing this work.

Supporting the oral records are the archival materials. These are the official documents of the British Government that took charge of our study area in the nineteenth century. They were collected from the British National Archives (Public Records Office) London. From these materials came the details of the events of the Opobo-Ibeno relations and how it led to Atlantic trade in palm oil and the subsequent war. Also used are the secondary sources of published works of the previous researchers to authenticate certain facts. With these sources and the causal methods of events that evaluated each other, this work was reconstructed.

Opobo-Ibenu Relations

Opobo and Ibenu are in the Niger Delta. The Ibenu are part of the Obolo (Andoni) people with roots at Ngo and other Obolo settlements (Enemugwem 2000:131-138). Their forebears left their Obolo homeland around 1700 for the Kwa Ibo river estuary and established nine primary settlements, namely, Okoroutip, Okoroitak, Ntafit, Iwuoachang, Mkpanak (Big Town), Ibra-Obolo (Opolom), Amajjah, Upenekang and Atabrikang II. While the first five were chronologically founded in the eighteenth century period of the Atlantic slave trade, the last four were built in the nineteenth century era of the Atlantic trade in palm oil. They constitute the Ibenu group of the Obolo (Andoni).

On the other hand, Opobo Kingdom of King Jaja is located at the Imo River estuary in Obolo (Andoni). Jaja was an Igbo by birth and Ibani by acculturation through slavery. Before he left Bonny and founded the Opobo city-state, he was already a man of great energy, quiet dignity, and diplomatic ability; always active and zealous in the Atlantic trade. With an infectious energy, he had the largest markets in the interior. Hence, majority of the Europeans at Bonny were trading with him. In 1869, Jaja was defeated in a war between him and the Bonny. They pursued him and his group into the Andoni area of Asaramatoru along the Rio Real. But the Andoni people of Old Asarama here turned out and rescued him and his Anna Pepple group. This encouraged Jaja to establish in Obolo (Andoni) and thereby went into relationship with the Ibenu (Smith 1937, Jeffreys, 1930 and Webber, 1931).

How Jaja Established His Sovereignty in Obolo (Andoni)

Obolo (Andoni) is the homeland of the Ibenu. Initially, Jaja was least interested in building his city-state there. Two British traders, Charles de Cardi and Archie Arthur McEachen, persuaded him to do so for the 'English vessels go to Andoney solely to buy oil' (Livingstone 1870, De Cardi and McEachen 1870). In 1867, these two British merchants saw the Andoni fishing ground, *Otunkon*, at the Imo river estuary suitable for international maritime trade and negotiated with the Andoni oligarchy for acquisition since it is nearer the hinterland markets. They used Jaja to promote British trade there. As Irving observed,

undercover of the truce obtained for him by the
Europeans, Jaja with his slaves and household
fled to the place now known as Opobo in the

Andoney country, having obtained permission from the Andoney king to establish themselves there (Irving to Nugent 1882).

For this reason, the Andoni-Jaja Accord, an oath of goodwill and loyalty to the Obolo, was administered on Jaja. The penalty of breaking it by either party was death (Utong, 1997:32).

In order to stabilize him in the Andoni territory, de Cardi and McEachen pressurized Britain to sign two treaties with Jaja. These are the Anglo-Bonny-Opobo Peace Treaty and the Anglo-Opobo Pact. Her Majesty's Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, Charles Livingstone, effected them accordingly in 1873. To Hertslet (1950:18), Britain used the Anglo-Opobo Pact of Saturday 4 January, 1873 to establish him as a sovereign and Opobo his sovereignty and expected him to rule in Her Majesty's interest as he earlier promised.

According to Udo (1983:81), this treaty that established Jaja's sovereignty in Andoni territory was what made him an Andoni man and not only the Andoni-Jaja Accord of 1869.

Nevertheless, the Anglo-Bonny-Opobo Peace Treaty signed on Friday January 3, 1873 includes the Obolo (Andoni). The treaty declares peace between Bonny and Opobo. Either party was not to confront each other but refer all disputes to the British consul. The main causes of the dispute between Bonny and Opobo were identified as the ownership of the hinterland palm oil markets. Owing to this fact, six markets at Akwete and four in Urata were allocated to Bonny. Jaja was given the exclusive right to Opobo or Imo river markets which extends to Azumini Creek. Consul Charles Livingstone told the king and chiefs of Bonny on July 15, 1873 that without doing it this way Bonny and Opobo 'would fight if they meet in the same markets'. However, anyone that breaches the treaty was liable to 1000 puncheons of palm oil or withdraws from the Atlantic trade (Hertslet, 1950:55-57).

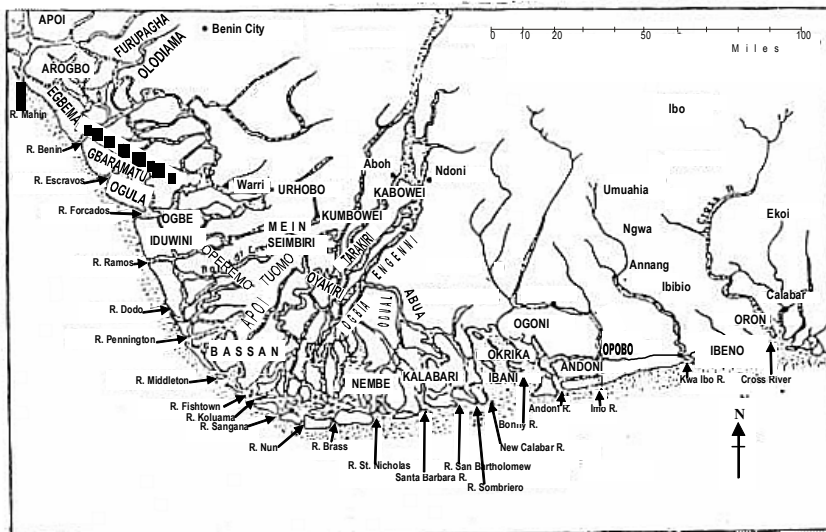
Britain documented the Obolo (Andoni) rights and freedom of trade in any market of their choice without molestation, as follows.

Besides Bonny men and Opobo men whose palaver we were settling, there were the absent Andoney, owners of the country.

None of their rights or privileges as owners of all the creeks leading to the markets was to be sacrificed in a Treaty between Bonny and Opobo (Livingstone to Granville 1873).

This right also extended to the Ibeno who are a segment of the Obolo (Andoni) people.

Map of the Oil Rivers showing Andoni, Opobo and Ibeno



The Remote and Immediate Causes of the War

The Ibeno account of the war mentioned two major remote causes. First is Jaja's inability to interpret the above treaties correctly and know that Kwa Ibo Basin was not among his markets. Second is his intrusion into the

Atlantic trade at the Kwa Ibo estuary. Trade in palm produce shifted to the Kwa Ibo River in the Eastern Niger Delta Fringe following the British free trade policy. Jaja's largest palm oil markets were along Essene Creek, a tributary of both the Imo and Kwa Ibo Basins. With the inauguration of piassava and palm kernel in the trade, the Kwa Ibo area was having the largest palm produce markets in the Niger Delta. This attracted him. Oral account of King Ebitu of Ibeno stated that he cautioned his European friends, Mr. A. Robertson, Mr. A. McEachen and Mr. Bell who were there, between 1871 and 1873, to withdraw because of their monopoly agreement with him at the Imo river estuary.

As Jaja's monopoly also affected the British Consuls' penetration into the hinterland districts in 1875, Consul David Hopkins persuaded Britain to legalize free trade in the Niger Delta. Hence trade liberalization was advertised in the *African Times* of April 1, 1879, calling on English traders for a direct trade with the oil producers (Burns 1981:152). While a European trader, George Watts reacted positively to this advertisement, the Ibeno who were desirous for Atlantic trade on the Kwa Ibo River to save them from going to Calabar port. Led by the Efik merchant, Chief Joseph Henshaw, Watts entered into trade agreement with the Ibeno monarch, King Uko Utong, and his chiefs on Wednesday December 1, 1880. The Ibeno documented Watts as binding himself to good deeds and loyalty to them. He agreed to pay King Uko Utong 'a duty of ten shillings per ton on all the produce exported from the Kwa Ibo country' and to collect for Ibeno all import duties on European goods brought into the Kwa Ibo Basin. He would pay the Ibeno half of the amount and use the remaining half for his expenses. It was on this basis that the Ibeno hierarchy gave Watts the official permit on Monday February 7, 1881 to explore the Kwa Ibo Basin. He built his factory and main station at Ibeno with three branches in the Basin where he introduced coffee, cocoa and oil palm plantations (Ibeno Papers, 1861-1972).

However, King Jaja of Opobo met with King Uko Utong of Ibeno immediately after the above agreement in 1881. His worry, principally, was Watts' establishment of cash crop plantations in the Basin. From here he vowed that if King Uko Utong refuses to send the European merchants away, he will not only prove his mettle in the battlefield but will also annex the Kwa Ibo Basin to his sovereignty. Oral account of Chief David Enyina states that two reasons made the Ibeno to disagree with Jaja. King Uko Utong and

Chief Enyina Akpanam of Upenekang were engaged in the trade and their markets were the rich palm belt of the Kwa Ibo Basin. Second, Ibeno sovereignty was independent of Jaja's Opobo. Jaja himself knew this and said, 'although I had no claim to the territory near the mouth of the Qua Eboe River, Mr Watts would still have no right to trade there, for any oil which he could get would either be bought in or drawn from my markets' (Jaja to Clarendon, 1881).

At last dialogue between the Opobo and the Ibeno failed. But Jaja did not take it kindly to see the same Liverpool traders whom he sent away from Opobo because of their free trade policy, establishing trading factories on the Kwa Ibo. About twenty eight of them including George Watts, Henry Watts, John Holt and Mr Vivour had agreements with the Ibeno hierarchy. Nevertheless, Jaja's threat for war was ignored by the Ibeno. European traders told Ibeno Chiefs not to exercise any fear that 'whatever rights Jaja has at Opobo were conferred by Her Majesty's Consul and no rights whatever were given to him over the Qua Iboe people' (Holt to Clarendon, 1882).

But then the immediate causes of the war began with one of Jaja's slaves, Asangikpong (Asanquo), whom he sent to the Kwa Ibo estuary for espionage. Setting foot on the Ibeno mother town of Okoroutip in early 1881, he purported to be a trader going to the Ibibio hinterland. But his contact and love with an Ibeno widow made him to confide in her that he is from King Jaja of Opobo. The widow who understood the rift between the Opobo and the Ibeno tied a ball and gave to Asangikpong to deliver to Jaja that it is from King Uko Utong of Ibeno. Jaja interpreted it as an abuse from the Ibeno ruler that his scrotum is as big as the ball and reciprocated in like manner. King Utong sent the messenger back that he had never sent him such a thing (Enyina and Utong, 1990).

Unknown to the Ibeno monarch, Asangikpong returned and continued his love affairs with the Okoroutip widow. They got to a point that the woman was no longer interested in him because he was involved in theft. Fracas ensued between them and led to the death of the woman. The Ibeno, having known that he is Jaja's man and that Jaja wants to take away their lucrative trade with the Europeans, retaliated and killed him.

The news got to King Jaja who suggested three things to them. He wanted the Ibeno to accept punishment for killing his man or surrender honourably to him and become a province of his sovereignty. In the alternative, they should dismiss Watts and European traders on the Kwa Ibo River. But the Ibeno chiefs did not agree to any of these suggestions. Instead, they paid reparation of 4000 manilas to the Opobo king for the loss of his man. Although Jaja pretended to have been appeased, he was buying time to prepare for a punitive expedition to Ibeno. The relationship became strained and hastened Jaja's campaigns which the Ibeno responded (Enyina and Utong, 1990).

Jaja's Campaigns and the Ibeno Responses

Ibeno tradition recalled how their ruler, King Uko Utong, had a wind of the expedition and constituted a Traditional War Council. The council consisted of himself who is also the village head of Okoroutip, other village heads of Okoroitak, Iwuoachang, Mkpanak (Big Town Ibeno), and Ukpenejang villages that are located at the Kwa Ibo estuary. Ibeno leaders of thought were also members. King Uko Utong chaired it. While meeting in the Ibeno traditional parliament building at Okoroutip, *ufok isong*, the Ibeno monarch intimated them with the news of Jaja's punitive expedition to the Kwa Ibo. After much deliberation, they inferred that Jaja's expedition would only target the Liverpool trading factories and the villages at the estuary. It was on this basis that the Ibeno national god, *Abasi Ibeno*, was transferred from Okoroutip to Mkpanak that was hidden in the creeks at the estuary. Henceforth Mkpanak became the Ibeno traditional headquarters (Utong 1990).

The crucial significance in the meeting was the disagreement on defence strategies. To everyone's dismay, the Village Head of Mkpanak, Chief Isaqua Aquaha, emphasized that the Kwa Ibo people would not be able to withstand Jaja. This disorganized the meeting. In examining their problems, they were greatly handicapped. All the European traders on the Kwa Ibo whose interest were being protected had travelled to England at the time. Thus, there was no military might to counter Jaja. This limitation rendered the Ibeno helpless as they could only set up vigilante groups to monitor the arrival of the Opobo forces and defend the area (Utong 1990).

Ibeno local history remembered Jaja's preparation for the expedition, which took about one month. For logistics and tactical reasons, they hired

mercenaries from Iko community in Eastern Obolo (Andoni). The Iko speak *Ibino* language with the Ibenu. Jaja found them valuable and used them as war baits. Having certified that there were adequate men and ammunitions, the punitive expedition supervised by King Jaja and Chief Cookey Gam took off for Ibenu. His armada of fifty war canoes were fitted with the best firearms of the times. Ibenu traditions noted that they left Opobo in the night of Sunday April 10, 1881. On reaching Amajia village on the Kwa Ibo Creek, enroute to Ibenu, dogs responded to the propelling sound of Jaja's armada. This made King Jaja to order the gigs to land and plunder the settlement (Enyina, 1990).

They were on the Kwa Ibo River early on Monday April 11, 1881. Although the Ibenu vigilante groups sunk two of their war-canoes, they were not of equal might. At day break, the Opobo troops destroyed the Liverpool trading factories as well as the Ibenu villages at the estuary. Except Mkpnanak which was untouched because of its hidden location in the creek, the affected villages were Okoroutip, Okoroitak, Iwuoachang and Upenekang. This gave room to casualties and entreaties.

Casualties and Entreaties

There were casualties and entreaties of the war. The defenceless Ibenu group took to the woods. Both Ibenu and Iko oral accounts testified of their insecurity. As soon as the Iko mercenaries went into the woods and used *Ibino* language to shout that Jaja and his army had gone, the first 200 that emerged from hiding were slaughtered by the Opobo. King Uko Utong of Ibenu and his son, Prince Nso, were captured from their mangrove hideout at Okoroutip and beheaded (Anantia and Utong, 1990).

However, the Ibenu oral account stated that about 400 people died and farm crops were not spared (Egbe 1990). Some of them died of hunger while in the woods because of Jaja's army of occupation staying for months. Strengthening this assertion is Welsh (1965:239-294) who saw how some of the captives were killed at Opobo. According to him, 'two hundred Ibenu, mostly women and children, were slain'. They include the wife and three children of an Ibenu potentate, Chief Okon. It was the cost in blood and treasure that forced Hewett's appeal to Jaja on May 2, 1881 to spare the lives of those yet to be killed (Hewett to Jaja 1881). Arising from this appeal, some Ibenu leaders taken to Opobo as captives were spared. Owing to their entreaties, they were forced by Jaja to sign a document, thus,

We, the undersigned representatives of Qua Iboe people, hereby declare that we are authorised to acknowledge Jaja as our King and to crave his protection and place ourselves under his authority for all time coming (FO 84/1630 of 1881).

Jaja's armada did not leave Ibeno for months despite the threats by Britain through Her Majesty's Consul. In the night of May 16, 1881, Jaja's war gig attacked the Ibeno in one of their villages they were rebuilding. His soldiers revealed to Watt's representatives their mission of exterminating any Ibeno man and woman seen. In order to survive, the Ibeno took to guerrilla warfare for four years, 1881–1884 with casualties (Hewett to Jaja 1881). Ibeno local history posit that this strategy and the more efficient weapons later given to them by the Liverpool traders, as well as the intervention of the British Consul, drove the Opopo away from the Kwa Ibo estuary (Afiko and Okpo Ita, 1990).

Nonetheless, the wind of their preparation with the British traders for retaliation reached Jaja and he entreated for mediation. He used his Andoni in-laws and Atlantic palm produce traders like Chief Ikuru of Ikuru Town as mediators (Ejituwu 1991:135-157). Jaja preferred rehabilitating the Ibeno people than going to another war. It was not until 1885 when Chief Udoeka Osukpa was enthroned as the new king of Ibeno that they actually went for the rehabilitation. The new monarch was invited by Jaja to come and receive the rehabilitation fund and materials for the rebuilding of the affected Kwa Ibo villages and maintenance of the refugees but he could not go early.

King Dan Utong of Ibeno in an oral account in 1989 and 1990 emphasized that the second invitation from Jaja was through an Ibeno emissary from Okoroutip, Mr. Enim Adam. He was one of the captives taken to Opopo. He took King Udoeka Osukpa to King Jaja. Osukpa's reign, 1885 – 1904, became the reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction period in Ibeno.

The Refugee Settlements

There were refugees and captives emanating from the war. They established their camps at many places in the area between the Kwa Ibo and Imo Rivers estuaries in the Eastern Niger Delta Fringe. At the Imo River estuary is the Opopo kingdom of King Jaja that expanded in population during this time as

a result of the influx of captives and refugees. The captives and refugees were camped in Opopo Town and other places in the kingdom. The area is now in Opopo-Nkoro Local Government Area in the Rivers State of Nigeria (Smith 1937, Okworo, 1989 & Pepple, 1990).

Refugee camps were also noticed along the Kwa Ibo River in some Ibibio towns and villages in what is now Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The Ibeno who fled into the Ibibio hinterland due to the war camped at the Ibibio communities of Ebana, Ede-Obuk, Effor, Ekpene Obo, Mbiokporo, Ndiya, Ekpene Ukpa, Ibagwa, Ndonutum, Ique and Ikot Akpatek in Oniong Nung Ndem Awa (ONNA). These communities now formed ONNA, Eket, Esit Eket, Nsit Ubium and Etinan Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. Other Ibeno refugees such as Okuoluo Ipekwe, Abasi Ekpo and Nna households, to mention a few, from Osung Atanwa families of Okoroutip were camped in Esit Urua and Afaha-Eket settlements (Ibeno to Jones 1956, Ebitu and Utong, 1990).

For the Iko communities in the Kwa Ibo Creek, there were those who escaped conscription into Jaja's army as well as the refugees of the war. The Old Iko Town at the estuary of the Ichana Creek was totally deserted. The inhabitants and the Iko mercenaries who fought the war with Jaja became the first settlers of the modern-day Iko Town, Atabrikang I, Atabrikang II, Edonwi, Ikonta and Kampa villages in what is now Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. In the case of Kampa Village, it was first settled by Madam Kampa Ekprikpe of Iko during the war and used as a refugee camp for the Nkanta and Ibritam families of the Old Iko Town (Robert and Okworo 1989, Pepple and Afiko 1990). Madam Kampa was later married after the war to Sam Annie Pepple of Opopo Town who was one of the commanders of the war. His Ibani relations of Opopo came through him and settled permanently at Kampa Village. It should be noted that these new settlements are now contributing to the development of Nigeria. Ibeno, Iko and Opopo communities are the home of petroleum resources in Akwa Ibom and Rivers States. But the casualties in the war are the bedrock of their underdevelopment.

Nevertheless, one of the refugees from Mkpanak (Big Town Ibeno) was Mr Nwaenang Eka. He fled from Ibeno during the war in April 1881 to Creek Town, near Calabar. There, he bore Professor Eyo Ita in 1903. Professor Ita

pioneered the Nigerian Youth League Movement (NYLM) in 1933. This movement metamorphosed into several nationalist movements and finally the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). Eyo Ita became the First African Head of Government of Eastern Nigeria between 1951 and 1953. His ideology aided Nigerian nationalists to free the country from British rule in 1960 (Enemugwem, 1992: 50-55).

Conclusion

Atlantic trade started in the Niger Delta in the second half of the fifteenth century. Reaching the nineteenth century, the article of trade changed from human cargo to forest produce. Two big palm oil brokers in the Eastern Niger Delta Fringe were King Jaja of Opobo and King Uko Utong of Ibenu. While the Ibenu are Obolo (Andoni) by birth, Jaja was an Igbo by blood, Ibani and Andoni by acculturation. Their participation in the Atlantic trade resulted into the Jaja-Ibenu War of 1881. As a result, refugee camps were established in the Ibibio and Opobo areas. In Eastern Obolo (Andoni), new settlements of the Iko community along the Kwa Ibo Creek emerged while the old ones were expanded through the influx of refugees. The war took place in the Eastern Niger Delta Fringe.

Brief Biographical Note

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